



Washington State Department of Agriculture *Hearing Notice*

For immediate release: Sept. 26, 2003 (03-43)

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WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

P.O. Box 42560, Olympia, Washington 98504-2560

Assessment increase would boost program to protect against fruit tree diseases

OLYMPIA – The state Department of Agriculture (WSDA) is proposing to increase the assessment rate on the wholesale price of fruit tree and related ornamental nursery stock from one to two percent. Under the proposal, the assessment on a \$5 fruit tree would increase from 5 to 10 cents. A hearing is scheduled for 1 p.m. Oct. 7 in the conference room at the WSU Tree Fruit Research & Extension Center, 1100 N. Western Ave., Wenatchee.

The assessment has funded WSDA's fruit tree certification program since the early 1970s. Funding has been affected in recent years by a decline in apple tree sales and an increase in WSDA program expenses.

"The current assessment is no longer adequate to cover the costs of the program," said Tom Wessels, manager of the Plant Services Program. "Without increased funding, we would be forced to stop the certification program."

The 2003 Legislature authorized WSDA to increase the assessment in excess of the fiscal growth factor. The proposed increase would boost revenues by some \$200,000 each year. "That puts the program in good financial position for the foreseeable future," Wessels said.

WSDA established the fruit tree certification program at the request of the tree fruit industry in 1962 to provide growers with a source of disease-free planting stock. The program, along with strict state and federal quarantines, eliminated many of the virus and virus-like diseases that once plagued the tree fruit industry.

In recent years, however, new virus diseases have emerged, such as cherry leaf roll virus and plum pox virus, that are again threatening the state's tree fruit crop. Diseases that were once common in the industry are also increasing in some fruit growing areas. "It's crucial to growers to have access to disease-free planting stock in order to minimize the impact of these diseases on yields and quality," Wessels said.

For a copy of the proposed rules, call Henri Gonzales at (360) 902-2061 or access the WSDA Web site at <http://agr.wa.gov/PlantsInsects/Rulemaking.htm>. Send written comments to: Washington State Department of Agriculture, P.O. Box 42560, Olympia, WA 98504-2560. Comments may be sent by fax to (360) 902-2094 or by e-mail to hgonzales@agr.wa.gov. Deadline for comments is 5 p.m. Oct. 7.

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